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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

JAN 20 1959 DATE: January 23, 1959

SUBJECT: Reply to Soviet Note on Germany; Berlin Contingency Planning

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Charles Lucet, Minister, French Embassy
① Mr. Foy D. Kohler, EUR
Mr. Thomas D. McKiernan, GPA

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In reply to Mr. Lucet's question whether the Germans had requested a postponement of the meeting date for the Four-Power Working Group on Germany, Mr. Kohler said that we were now trying to arrange to meet on February 5. Mr. Lucet then inquired about our ideas about the level of participation in the Group. Mr. Kohler replied that we envisaged participation at various levels. A start might be made by Mr. Merchant and the Ambassadors, accompanied by Mr. Kohler, Mr. Hillenbrand and comparable representation from the British and French sides. Other meetings might be held at a lower level, e.g., with Mr. Kohler as the principal United States representative. Mr. Lucet stated that he had been instructed to participate and that other French representatives were coming from Paris, including Mr. Laloy. Mr. Laloy would remain in Washington only a few days, however.

Mr. Lucet said that he could now confirm that the French were working on a draft reply to the Soviet note of January 10 and that they wished to spare the Working Group from having to devote too much of its time to drafting. Mr. Kohler replied that we would also propose a draft for consideration.

As to the substance of the reply, Mr. Lucet said that preliminary French thinking was that the Three Powers' determination to maintain access to Berlin should be restated; that the Three Powers should declare their willingness to

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discuss any matter, including European security; and that the Western Powers should express their willingness to accept a Soviet suggestion for a conference.

Mr. Kohler replied that the Soviet note had already made two suggestions: one for a monster conference to conclude a German peace treaty and the other for preliminary Four-Power discussions with the participation of the two German states. The latter suggestion gave us an opening, but there remained the problem of a formula for GDR participation. We might, for example, reply that the Soviet Union might wish to arrange for observers from "the regime which the Soviet Union chooses to call the GDR." While we had not yet thought the matter through, we were thinking in terms of a simple agenda, e.g., "questions relating to Germany" with the qualification that neither side might exclude discussion of any aspect of the German question.

Mr. Lucet said that, while the French accepted the idea of a Foreign Ministers' meeting in principle, they did not believe that it should be held, as had been suggested, at the end of April. To call for a meeting "in the shadow of an ultimatum" would be a sign of weakness. The French therefore believed the date should be put off until after the termination of the six months' delay mentioned by the Soviets.

Mr. Kohler replied that this was a point to be thought over, but that our own thinking had gone the other way. We felt that the Soviets will seek a way to withdraw from their position on Berlin if we remain firm. It would therefore be advisable to give the Soviets some face-saving device prior to May 29. A conference would give them a way to get "off the hook."

Mr. Lucet then mentioned that the French Ambassador in Moscow had reported that he believed the Soviet bloc would conclude a separate peace treaty with the GDR if the Western Powers rejected the idea of a peace treaty at this time. Mr. Kohler replied that he thought this a very good estimate. This possibility, Mr. Lucet said, was one more reason for accepting the idea of negotiations.

Mr. Kohler then mentioned to Mr. Lucet that he had spoken to Viscount Hood earlier in the day regarding the unfortunate publicity which had been given to our contingency planning discussions. The British apparently believed that the Joseph Alsop story of January 19 had been leaked from official American sources and they had leaked more information to Don Cook on the following day. What was even worse was that Alsop had informed Mr. Murphy that he had spoken to Ambassadors Caccia and Alphand, had "all the facts," felt that it was his "duty" to publish them, and probably would do so Sunday (January 25). Mr. Murphy had told Mr. Alsop this would have a bad effect, but he had the impression Mr. Alsop would publish a second article anyway. Mr. Kohler and Viscount Hood had agreed that, regardless of where the fault lay, it was time to stop such publicity and that further fuel should not be added to the fire. More speculation was to be expected, but the Department of State, if pressed for comment, would state only that consultations are taking place, that no decision has been

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taken, and that, if decisions had in fact been taken, they would not be revealed. Mr. Lucet agreed that further publicity should be stopped.

With respect to tripartite discussion of contingency planning, Mr. Kohler said that it was hoped that another meeting could be held in the middle of the following week, after Mr. Murphy's return. In this meeting the United States would offer its comments on the language suggested by the French and would like to hear the British military views.

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